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ABSTRACT

This booklet presents the story of Benito Martinez Elementary, one urban elementary school in the midst of change and renewal. It is one of 85 schools with which the National Institute for Urban School Improvement is involved in partnerships for change. Through the stories of parents, students, teachers, and administrators, the booklet describes how the school is making fundamental and enduring changes in its work, and thus in the lives of children and youth. After presenting an overview of the school, the booklet explains how the effort began, focusing on planning for student academic achievement and teacher learning. It goes on to explain how the school planned "leadership from the back" to create a professional community, with principals sharing their leadership tasks with teachers and families. The next section explains how the school planned to improve and expand family and school linkages. The booklet concludes by summarizing how Benito Martinez Elementary School has succeeded at the professional development effort level, school organizational level, district effort and support level, and student learning level. (SM)

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ED 455 340

SCHOOLS ON THE MOVE:

Stories of Urban Schools Engaged in Inclusive Journeys of Change

Benito Martinez Elementary

EL PASO, TEXAS

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR URBAN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

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INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

Good for Kids, Families & Communities

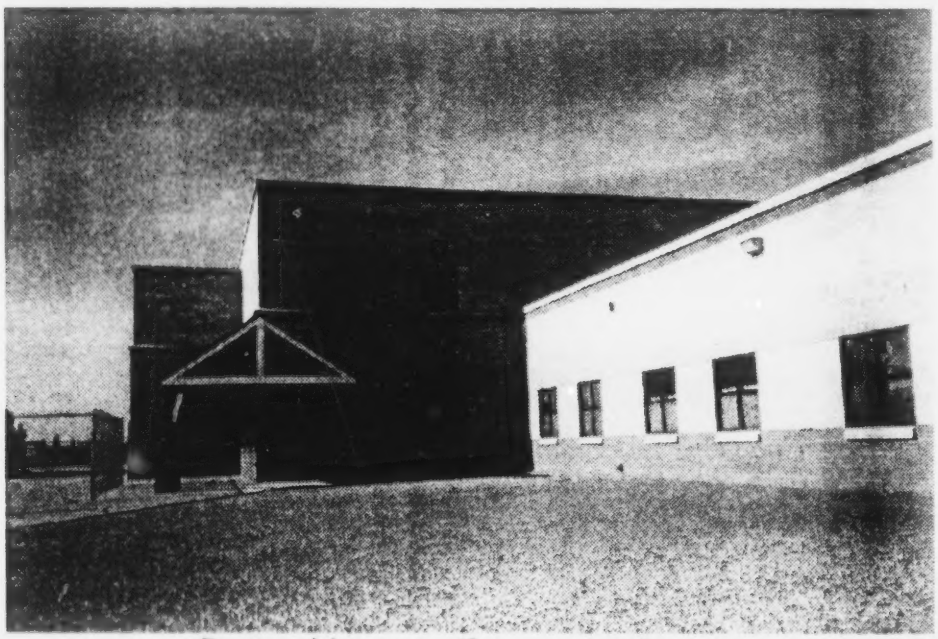
The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education, funds the National Institute for Urban School Improvement to facilitate the unification of current general and special education reform efforts as these are implemented in the nation's urban school districts. The National Institute's creation reflects OSEP's long-standing commitment to improving educational outcomes for all children, specifically those with disabilities, in communities challenged and enriched by the urban experience.

May 2001

SCHOOLS ON THE MOVE:

Stories of Urban Schools Engaged in Inclusive Journeys of Change

These stories depict schools in the midst of exciting changes and renewal. Through the voices of parents, students, teachers, and administrators, these ***Schools on the Move*** are making fundamental and enduring changes in the work of schools and in the results that such changes make in the lives of children and youth. None of these schools' journeys are finished, but the work accomplished and the challenges still to be met offer inspiring lessons about what is possible. We recognize that all schools start from different points, face different challenges, and make decisions based on their local context. Our intention, then, is not to provide checklists of change so much as evidence of effort in the ongoing pursuit of inclusive urban schools. Let us know what you think.



BENITO MARTINEZ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Benito Martinez Elementary School

About 20 boys and girls, representatives of all the grade 3–5 classes in the school, made their way to seats around the big table in the upper library. They were ready to talk to us, the visitors from Oregon—a task for which they were rewarded with Pizza Hut pizza and punch contributed by one of the school's business partners, who were also parents at the school.

As slices of cheese, veggie, and pepperoni pizza made their way around the table, we asked our opening question.

"Tell us what you like best about this school?"

> "The rules. Because the monitors make sure that no one gets hurt and there's no fighting."
>
> "I like the library 'cause I like to read books." "Me, too." "I like the library."

"That's great," we summarized. "Most of you like the library because you like to read and they have good books." "You have something different," Dianne noted, acknowledging one of the girls. "What do you like?"

> "I like P.E. 'cause sometimes we go outside and we do, like, activities."
>
> "I like math."

"Yeah? What do you like about math?" Dianne asked.

> "I like doing addition."
>
> "I like homework because it helps me learn better."
>
> "I like not having a dress code."
>
> "I like art because I just like drawing stuff."
>
> "I like the teachers because they are really friendly and really helpful."
>
> "I like the award assemblies."

"Right. We heard about those this morning," Dianne responded. "Every six weeks. One person in every class gets an award. Is that right?"

"Yeah. Patriot Pride."

"I like the teachers because they help me understand everything I'm learning."

"I like the school because my brother can't talk very well and the teachers help him."

Of course, there were things the students didn't like so much, too. But what struck us during our visit at Benito Martinez was that people talked a lot about what they **did** like about teaching and learning and what **was** "working," and how proud they were of their achievements as a learning community. We realized that a portrait of this *School on the Move* must include, and perhaps focus on, the students' and teachers' stories about what and how they all teach and learn with such enjoyment and success. Students *like the teachers because they help them learn** is a child's way of putting it.

Benito Martinez Students Spring 2000

Total Number of Students - 957
Latino – 78%
Anglo – 19.2%
African American – 1.8%
Economically Disadvantaged – 46.7%

But important subplots fill out the account of this school's journey toward becoming an inclusive learning community. The unique leadership and the collaborative efforts of teachers, staff, and administrators to achieve this learning are two additional stories, and the pizza is a metaphor for the third–the parents and their involvement, support, and contributions. First some fast facts.

Benito Martinez Elementary School at a Glance

Hugging the banks of the Rio Grande River, the city of El Paso sits on the border between Texas and Mexico. Interstate 10 travels east and west, roughly paralleling the curves of the river and dividing the city north and south. Benito Martinez Elementary School sits "north of the freeway" on the eastern border of the city where the construction of new homes and businesses barely keeps up with the rapid growth in population. Communities seem to spring from the desert, spreading east and north, one after another. Many of the roads at the edges of the residential areas end abruptly at sand and sagebrush, just waiting for the construction of the next wave of homes which will require the addition of new lengths of pavement to the network of roads.

Named for a Korean War hero and Medal of Honor winner, Benito Martinez Elementary School is one of 15 elementary schools in the Socorro Independent School District, the second largest of the three districts in the city of El Paso. The Benito Martinez legacy provides a strong unifying theme for the school, which opened in 1991 in a new working

**Use of italics in the text indicate that the words are a direct quotation from someone at Benito Martinez Elementary School.*

class neighborhood, where most of the families are Latino. Many of the Benito families have lived in the neighborhood for a number of years. Many others have recently arrived from Mexico and speak only Spanish. To aid the children of these families in the transition to learning in English, five of the 42 classes from PreK to grade five are bilingual.

As we approach the tan and gray cement block building, we notice that the "lawn" in the schoolyard is really volcanic cinder. The lack of vegetation in the schoolyard, save a number of small trees and a bit of grass near the entryway, bears testament to the effects of the hot, dry climate of west Texas. Already, at eight o'clock in the morning, the air conditioning in the building provides welcome relief from the heat outside on this day in late August. As the front door closes behind us, we face a hallway of gleaming walls. Even the floor sparkles in the bright interior. Dominating one wall of the space is a larger than life portrait of Benito Martinez. American flags, red, white, and blue decorations, and other symbols of patriotism make up the decorating theme of the school and fuel the school's motto–"Patriot Pride Comes from Inside"–an invitation to and a standard for all who work and visit here.

Benito Martinez Staff

- **61 teachers from PK-5**
- **a computer specialist**
- **2 P.E. teachers**
- **3 resource and support teachers**
- **2 school counselors**
- **a nurse**
- **a Title I teacher**
- **a music teacher**
- **a principal**
- **2 counselors**
- **3 classroom assistants, Fundamental Living Skills classroom**
- **a librarian**
- **a library assistant**
- **a speech clinician**

The year the school opened, the district implemented a year-round schedule. Benito was one of the few schools that instituted four separate tracks within that schedule, only three of which are ever in session at one time. This allows the school to accommodate almost 1,000 students and still maintain modest class sizes. All tracks are off for a week in July and two weeks at Christmas. Each track has a slightly different configuration, but all tracks have 177 days of instruction. The logistical challenges of this schedule are significant, and the additional challenge of maintaining a tightknit learning community, when a fourth of the school—students and teachers—are missing at any one time is daunting. But there are benefits that make the effort worthwhile and that seem to have contributed to the high achievement and success of the students at Benito.

The day before our visit, the school received notice of an "exemplary" rating from the Texas Education Agency for the 1999–2000 school year—the only elementary school in the district to achieve this status. A rating of "exemplary" means that at least 90 percent of all students pass the Texas Assessment of Academic Achievement (TAAS) in reading, writing, and math. An exemplary school must also report a one percent or less drop-out rate and at least a 94 percent attendance rate across all ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

Plots and Subplots

The work at Benito Martinez to build an inclusive school really began in 1991 with the opening of the school and the efforts of the first principal to hire faculty and build a community that would ensure the success of its students. This portrait of a *School on the Move* documents the results of the work of the past 10 years and tells stories that describe much about the journey of the staff, students, and families at Benito Martinez over the years.

There are certainly others. Schools are always more complex and dynamic than any written account can honor. Still, we think these accounts are ones that other schools might recognize, appreciate, and learn from.

Plotting Student Learning Accomplishments

Benito Martinez is a *School on the Move* because out of almost 1,000 students, only 37 students are officially receiving special education services. Yet the new "exemplary" status means that all are learning to the state standard as measured by the TAAS. All but the seven students in the Fundamental Learning Skills Classroom participated in TAAS. Having so few students identified as needing special education **and** having more than 90 percent of all the students pass TAAS standards means that teachers are helping students succeed, even those who might struggle with learning at one time or another. *It's the unity of the teachers. They want to see all students succeed. **All** of them.*

Students at Benito succeed, and most of them do so in the general classroom. One reason so few students actually become eligible for special education services is the Core Team of counselors, classroom teachers, family members, and various specialists that meet all day every Thursday to brainstorm and problem-solve ways to support and assist students and teachers having difficulties. Chaired by one of the counselors, any teacher can schedule time at the meeting. The Team's focus is to *see students succeed* by changing what happens in the classroom. If one idea doesn't work, or work well enough, the Team tries another. One teacher told us that sometimes the Core Team worked with teachers for a year or more to help students succeed. Only those students with significant difficulties, then, get referred for special education assistance.

Another reason students are learning at Benito Martinez is that they all have access to extra help through tutorials during their breaks. Teachers on break, community and family members, even other students help with the tutoring, and students can take as many tutorials as they want or need to feel and be more successful.

nt's Story:

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Still another reason for student success is that the bilingual classrooms use a Bilingual Immersion Program where students are taught Language Arts in Spanish and English and the rest of the subjects are taught in English. However, students are supported in Spanish whenever necessary. Most students, who come to Benito speaking no English, spend three to five years in a bilingual classroom and then join general education (monolingual) classrooms where most are successful. This attention to both academic and language learning supports Benito students to learn to the established state and district standards.

Dianne had asked the students in the library what they liked about school. As they passed the pizzas around for second helpings, she changed the question to, "What if somebody has trouble learning these things? What happens?"

> "That's how you get the Patriot Pride award – by helping people," a boy explained.
>
> Another student added, "We have this thing when we do math. Our teacher picks students to teach two other students who don't really understand math. So people who usually get high scores in math will help them and they will teach them what they learned so they understand."

The Principal's Reflection:

The teachers really do realize that every child learns at a different pace. It's a very diverse class in each classroom. So when they see somebody maybe straying away, for whatever reason, they get to the core of the problem and they look for an answer until they find it.

5

Dianne asked, "Do you ever do that? Do you like it?"

"It's cool," he replied.

Another student expanded, "When we don't get something, the teacher will stop and help you or stay on that subject for awhile and explain it."

A cautionary voice jumped in, "If they do tutoring, though, I don't think they should do it on Saturdays because you go to school for five days and then you get your weekend and all the kids enjoy the weekends."

Perhaps trying to add options, another student piped up, "I think that children can learn. If they need help, if they go in at lunch, if they don't understand or when we're out on recess, they could come in and get more help. Or when we're out on break, they can come in and get more help."

Dianne asked the group, "Does that happen? Do kids come in at lunch or on break to get more help?"

"Yeah," several students replied.

"Have you ever done that?" Dianne wondered.

"No. No," from several students.

"On reading," from another.

There are three ways special education services at Benito are organized for the 37 students who qualify. About 15 of the students are assigned to the "class within a class" option that was first introduced by the second principal. Students assigned to this option attend general classes, and are usually not too far behind their classmates. They can do well with some modifications. Two support teachers, who used to be first grade teachers, go to students' classrooms, assist the teacher and sometimes teach some or all of the students so the teacher can provide more intensive instruction to those who need it. One of these support teachers is bilingual and focuses her assistance in the bilingual classrooms to make sure that students with real learning difficulties don't slip through on the assumption that their problems are related to language. She also works to make sure that students don't fall behind because of difficulties with language. Another 15 students spend some part of each day with a resource room teacher for intensive instruction. Any other students who need assistance with anything go to the resource room for help when they need it. Seven students, not all from the Benito neighborhood, are assigned to a Fundamental Living Skills (FLS) class. The district supports a small number of FLS classrooms in various schools that serve

students with very significant learning challenges. Two of the students in the Benito FLS classroom spend most of their day in a general education classroom. The rest engage in a variety of activities throughout the school, sometimes on their own, sometimes with other students.

Teacher Learning

In successful schools, the emphasis on learning permeates the school community – everyone learns, expects to learn, and works at learning, including the teachers. The success of a learning community also depends upon people working together. At Benito, the emphasis on learning and collaboration is clearly evident in the way the teachers learn and work together.

The current principal believes:

> *It's something I think is very, very unique here. I think it's very common, unfortunately, that at many campuses, there's a lot of professional jealousy. Here, every teacher has her strength, but every teacher respects the other teachers for their strengths. They know what everybody's strength is, and they'll go to that person and say, "You know, I'm really struggling with writing right now. Can you help me? What is it that I'm doing wrong? How can I improve this?"*

Another way the teachers are using each other to improve both the school and student learning is through collaboration on the development and alignment of the curriculum. Two years ago, the teachers aligned their curriculum both within each grade level and across the levels. That is, all teachers of the same grade teach to a common set of standards and teachers at each grade can rely on what was taught the year before. The principal at the time explained to us that before the alignment:

A Parent's Story:

My son who is graduating this year started here in third grade. About 4th or 5th grade, they thought he was attention deficit. . . He just couldn't sit still. He had to be busy. And the teacher worked with him. [The teacher] didn't just say, "Okay, you're attention deficit. You're a bad kid, get over it" and just pass him along. [The teacher] worked with him. Now [my son is] totally into computers—that's his thing. He rebuilds them. I give them credit for not labeling him and saying he's a lost cause.

> There was a lot of quality there. Except the quality was being pulled in different directions. We had quality special education teachers, but they had a different plan and vision in mind. They were going in this direction. We had strong, quality bilingual teachers that were pulling in a completely different direction. And then the monolingual and regular ed teachers were pulling in a different direction.

They knew they needed to align the curriculum but the time to work together and the lack of money to pay for substitutes while they worked were holding them back. That's when Benito Martinez became involved with the National Institute. The National Institute's resources helped pay for substitutes and after a leadership academy sponsored by the National Institute, the school staff formed a Building Leadership Team (BLT), the members of which *wanted the whole curriculum aligned from pre-K all the way to fifth grade. We wanted to change our tutorial program and our enrichment programs so that they would be higher quality and wouldn't just repeat what students were having in the classroom.* During the BLT meetings, they also discovered that *we needed to include our bilingual and special education population so they weren't just separate things going on. It brought everything together.*

The focus on student learning is greatly assisted by another tool the faculty has developed over the last two years. Each grade level team has created a set of assessment rubrics that they use every six weeks to evaluate student learning results. The rubrics are aligned with the curriculum at each grade level, and the teachers feel that these assessments help them catch learning difficulties early. In this way, all students are working toward a clear set of standards and objectives and the frequent assessments help both students and teacher monitor growth and provide support and assistance when its needed.

Grade level teams meet weekly *to discuss what needs to be done or what change we need to see.* Time is created for these meetings by pairing cross-grade classes. So when the first grade teachers meet tomorrow morning from 8:00 to 9:00, their students will be with grade 3 or 4 classes where the peer-teaching is focused on literacy tasks. All the students benefit because the upper-grade classrooms *have some kids that maybe aren't reading at a third grade or fourth grade or fifth grade reading level and it gives them some success too.* The cross grade planning meetings happen less frequently – a couple of times a year and *maybe periodically if there's a need that creeps up on us* – but it's enough to create continuity. *We need to know and the kindergarten teachers need to know what we expect. We need to know what the second grade teachers expect.*

One of the parents noted that *it's about consistency with the teachers. They have grade level meetings on a regular basis. They know what everyone is teaching, maybe not the same way, but they're teaching the same thing. I think that's what helps us. The students are learning the same concepts from grade to grade.*

Of course, there will always be more work to do. Some of the grade teams *really have their stuff together* and other teams are working on the communication necessary to achieve that alignment. The year-round flex schedule creates challenges, even in grade teams, because someone is always missing. One teacher also felt that they find, like so many other groups of teachers do, *we have tried lots of different things and we don't give them time to work. That's been a difficulty.*

Still another challenge may be the state's accountability system itself. While Benito Martinez has consistently earned the "recognized" label and this year became "exemplary," we were not able to visit several classrooms that were having practice TAAS days. The students notice as well.

The students had finished the pizza and now were working on chocolate chip cookies. Dianne posed another question, "What do you think that teachers think is the most important thing for you to learn?"

> The boy directly across the table jumped in quickly. "Any subjects that we can learn and improve in that would involve the TAAS."

"So the most important thing for you to learn is anything that's on the TAAS?" Dianne followed up.

> "It's important to do others," he added, "but I think that's what teachers are looking for."

The rest of the group had different answers that reflected the very real effort teachers put into their work:

> "Mathematics, I think math because we need math in life, like telling time."
>
> "A good education so you can get into college."
>
> "Reading and writing."
>
> A small boy offered, "They think you need to know things that you will need your whole life, like, responsibility. . ."
>
> "The rules," someone else added.
>
> "Life skills."

"What's a life skill?" Dianne wondered aloud.

> "Respect and perseverance."
>
> "Any maybe responsibility."
>
> "And common sense. My dad always tells me that in baseball."

Plotting "Leadership from the Back" to Create a Professional Community

During our two days of watching and listening, we heard repeatedly about the professionalism of the staff. People who work here are *motivated, committed, hardworking, continually learning and improving, focused on students, competent, trusted, respected and caring, team members, leaders, and decision-makers*. That's the definition of a *professional* educator.

But it's not by accident. Benito's four principals over the last nine years have all approached their task "from the back" – sharing the leadership task with teachers and families and facilitating **their** ability to collectively direct the school's agenda.

Of the 61 general classroom teachers and 19 specialist teachers at Benito today, 80 percent were in the original group of educators who opened the school 10 years ago. Those who left did so either because they moved out of the area or went on to become administrators. Benito's current and fourth principal was a bilingual first grade teacher when the school opened. There's a waiting list of teachers who want to come to Benito. When a job is posted, there are lots of applicants and teachers and parents together choose new additions. They look for the qualities they feel are important. *It's not like an administrator saying, "This is who I want." The teachers are choosing the faculty, so you are getting people who are going to have your philosophy and fit in. We try to get someone who has the energy and philosophy – the personality of the school.*

From the first principal of the school who *truly believe[ed] in shared governance*, and was *surround[ed] with very strong teacher leaders*, to the current principal who continues to *lead from the back*, all four have created a climate of collaboration and distributed leadership. As one of the teachers reported about the third principal, *As a leader, he made sure (the teachers) had exactly what they needed*. The parents find this leadership style effective as well:

> I think they all work well together. We have such a strong group of teachers – as an administrator you have to feel comfortable 'leading from behind. It makes your job a lot easier.

There is a formal governance structure. The School Improvement Team (SIT) meets monthly with representatives from each grade level to discuss issues, make decisions, and formulate plans. The principal brings information and issues to the meetings, but teachers also identify issues at their grade level meeting to take to the SIT and parents can come with their concerns as well. The Building Leadership Team that formed a couple of years ago to work on curriculum alignment has since been merged with the SIT, contributing new teachers to the governance task.

Despite changes in principals and assistant principals, the leadership in this school rests quite firmly with the teachers and families who carry on, creating both stability for the school and enabling new administrators to facilitate ongoing improvements. ***The teachers really banded together. The administrators work with us.*** Some of the changes have created some ***tough times***. The district routinely moves principals and assistant principals to different buildings to enhance their own learning and professional development, but sometimes for Benito that has meant assistant principals who didn't always share the philosophy and vision held by the teachers. But these times have passed and the school has maintained its focus and direction, according to the teachers, because *we stuck together.*

Plotting to Improve and Expand Family and Community Linkages

Parents can see the school is "working." They are enthusiastic and complimentary. But their enthusiasm has been nurtured and invited. One parent told us that:

> The administration and the teachers welcome you, right from the first thing. You're dropping your kindergartner off and there are tears, and the teachers say, 'Why don't you stay or come back 15 minutes early, I need you to do something for me?' It's that understanding that starts right then that makes you feel welcome. And that also ropes you in to be a volunteer. Because once you start doing that you're hooked.

Benito also serves as a hub for the community. During the year, the parents take a major role in organizing and coordinating a variety of celebrations and events at the school to which the community is invited. There's a big Veterans' Day celebration. There's also the PTA Christmas Fair, held all day on a Saturday, that draws people from not just the immediate community, but from other nearby communities as well.

The role of parents and community at Benito is not accidental. From the very beginning, parents were invited not only to help but also to learn and teach. Soon after Benito opened, about 40 parents were spending time in the school for various reasons. Now, many parents link their businesses to the school – like the Pizza Hut that provided the pizzas for our student lunch interview – and contribute by providing the kind of things the school could not afford on its own. Over the years, the parents' contributions have grown and include parents engaged in the following activities:

- Being on call to assist with translation for students and parents who only speak Spanish.
- Reaching out to other parents, using a phone tree developed by the school to make sure all parents are well informed about what's happening in the school and *to convey a very strong message that we are all here together and we need you parents as partners in the education of your children.*
- Participating in staff development and learning. Teachers and parents have learned together about things like cooperative learning. So many parents responded to the opportunities that the school organized a team of students from the nearby high school to provide childcare.
- Teaching in classrooms. Teachers recruited and taught parents (most of whom had been participating in the staff development offerings) to teach in their classrooms while they met in study teams to work on school improvement. They were supervised closely by other teachers and the principal, but succeeded in carrying on instruction as designed by the teachers.
- Assisting in classrooms, doing buddy reading, and just providing more adults to teach.
- Running the school store where students redeem points from the Accelerated Reading (AR) programs.
- Serving as bus duty and safety monitors.
- Assisting in the health screenings.
- Serving on faculty interview committees.
- Serving on committees to plan honors assemblies.

cher's Thoughts:

e used to being wered... body's a profes- l here...our ipals trust ever we do in the room.

And, dads who work afternoon or midnight shifts come and play football with the boys at lunch. *And there are a lot of parents who are just here for the other kids whose parents can't be here.*

Perhaps the best summary of how parents are a part of Benito Martinez is the one provided by one of the fathers:

> My first association with the school was the Veterans' Day parade, and as a veteran myself, I felt humble. I felt proud to be around a school that recognized veterans in the way they do. So my association got stronger and stronger. I saw

how focused not only the teachers were, but how focused the administration was with respect to the teachers. There is such a good connection between the teachers and administration and the district here that the whole pie is put together. There is not a piece of the puzzle missing. The focus here is education, the focus here is safety, and the focus here is caring. There is love floating around this place. I have never seen such focus and such attention to detail in any other school I've been associated with. I've been around the world two times and in some places I've seen the same people twice and they haven't moved. This is a school on the move.

A Teacher's Thoughts:

We are used to administrators saying, "Okay, we need something done," and the teachers just picking up the ball and running with it. They let teachers do a lot of things.

"*You know*," another parent offered, "*we're gonna get rid of 'Patriot Pride'*."

"*That's right*," the dad confirmed, "*call it a 'School on the Move'*."

A Principal's Thoughts:

We all felt one person didn't carry all the information. We figured, and we really believed in the synergy we could create with one another. What one couldn't think of, somebody else did.

Continuing the Journey

The cookies had disappeared and the kids put the empty pizza boxes in the trash. It was almost time for them to return to their classes. "Are there things about this school that you wish were different?" Dianne asked. "Let's hear about some of those."

"The net on the playground. I wish it was still there."

"I want swings."

"New equipment for the playground."

"I wish the grass would grow."

Dianne refocused the group a bit. "Okay, we've focused on the outside of the building. What else would you want to be different?"

"More books in the library to read."

"More mystery books."

"Something that I don't really understand is that I feel sorry for the Spanish (kids) because we have all these fun books in the library we can read, but the Spanish kids just have AR (Accelerated Reading) books. They only have one shelf of fun books."

"I wish more of the books were AR books because some of the books I really want to read, but I need to earn points so that I can meet the standards, so I don't have time to read some of the ones I wish I could."

There were other wishes, of course, like *changing the food* so they could have more choice, but Benito's students seem as focused as their teachers and parents on learning in this community. There will certainly be challenges ahead for Benito Martinez as there are challenges now. There's a new need for a focus on safety, for example. Some people in the neighborhood still drive too fast. And sometimes students still fight, or, as one student told us, sometimes the student monitors *don't really treat you with respect. You don't do anything against the rules, but they just want to write your name down.*

There will also always be students who need help to learn, but even after everyone tries to help, some students will still find that *they ask the teacher, and she'll help them, and sometimes they still don't get it. It is so confusing.*

Perhaps one of the parents had the best advice for Benito's faculty. *Well, we're hoping it will grow. It'll continue to grow. Right now, Benito Martinez is a very good school. It's not perfect. Nothing is. But it's on a good track and hopefully in five years it will continue to be on a good track – still heading forward.* A *School on the Move*.

Epilogue

Successful and sustainable change is more likely to happen in schools where everyone shares a common vision and goals and where all contribute their individual talents and enthusiasm to the change efforts of the community. It is clear from this story that Benito Martinez is such a school, and that the work of its teachers, administrators, students, families, and community result in accomplishments that are supported and encouraged by the district administration.

Benito Martinez is one of 85 schools with which the National Institute for Urban School Improvement is involved in partnerships for change. The particular focus of the work in each of the schools is unique and depends on each school's history, goals, and culture. Regardless of the focus, however, each school works within a multi-layered and complex system. We have found it helpful, as we work across schools, to use a map, the Systemic

Change Framework, to help us organize our work, and to help the schools design, implement, and monitor their own plans and work for change.

The Systemic Change Framework visually represents the varying levels of effort that combine to effect students' achievement and learning. The four levels of the Framework are interconnected by the lines between them that represent the communication systems among families, school, and district personnel that are necessary for ongoing improvement and change. What occurs at the district level affects the school level, which in turn affects student learning. When all levels are in sync with each other, then the result is a healthy system that can better support student learning.

The figure (see page 16) illustrates the parts of the Framework that Benito Martinez faculty and families have been addressing. The highlighted cells graphically represent the work recounted in this story.

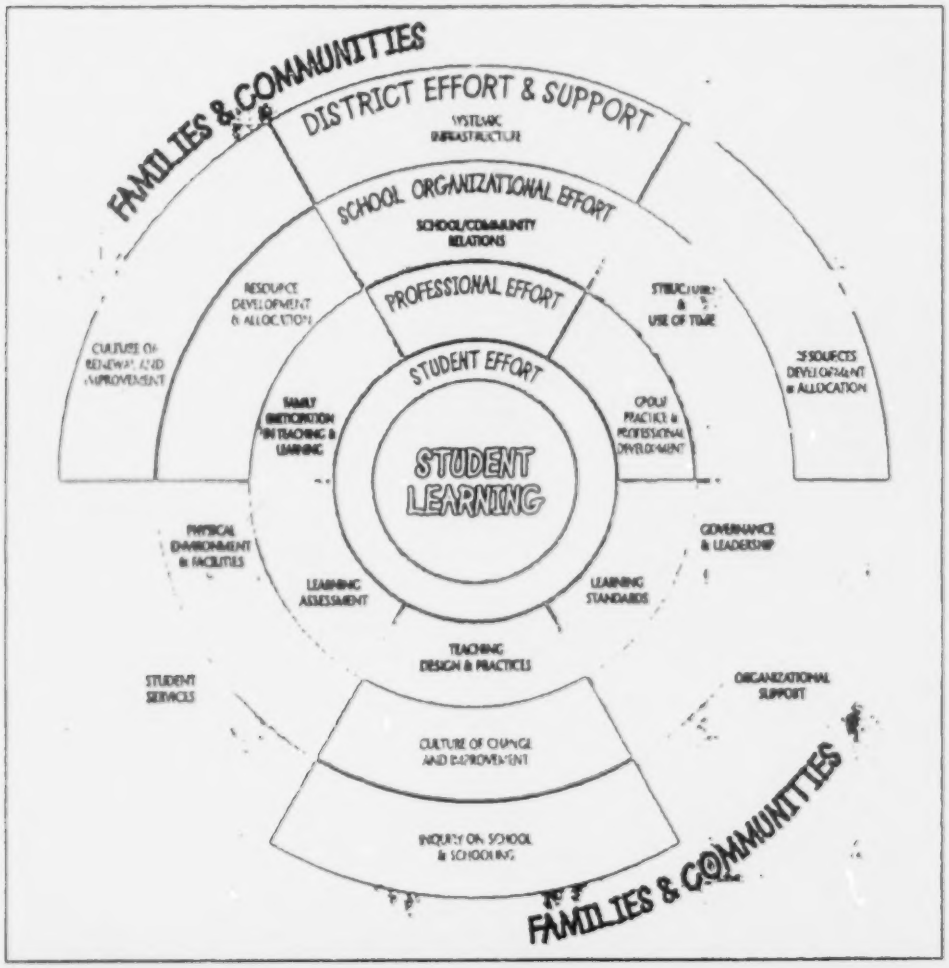
For instance, at the **Professional Effort** level, Benito has focussed on Learning Standards, Teaching Design and Practice, Learning Assessment, and Family Participation in Teaching and Learning. The evidences are the six-week assessments of student progress used by all grades, the work to align curriculum and teaching with the state standards and their high achievement on the TAAS, and the outstanding level of involvement of families in the activities of the school. The Class Within a Class, bilingual programs, and the efforts of the Core Team, are fine examples of the collaboration between general and special education.

At the **School Organizational Effort** level, School/Community Relations, Structure and Use of Time, Governance and Leadership, and Physical Environment and Facilities are areas in which the community has expended much effort. Of particular note at this level is the manner in which governance and leadership has developed at Benito to involve teachers, family members, and administrators in an unusually strong and effective partnership.

Finally, at the **District Effort and Support** level, we noticed that the areas of Organizational Supports and Student Services seem to be valued and supported through opportunities for professional development, the bilingual and Class Within a Class programs, and the healthy, productive partnerships between the district and other community organizations which further the renewal and improvement of schools.

Of course, it's **Student Learning and Effort** that are the main plot of this story and the result of the work of the members of the inclusive educational community at Benito Martinez.

SYSTEMIC CHANGE FRAMEWORK



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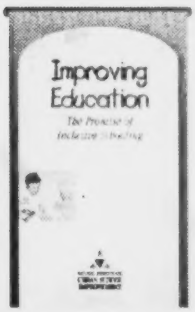

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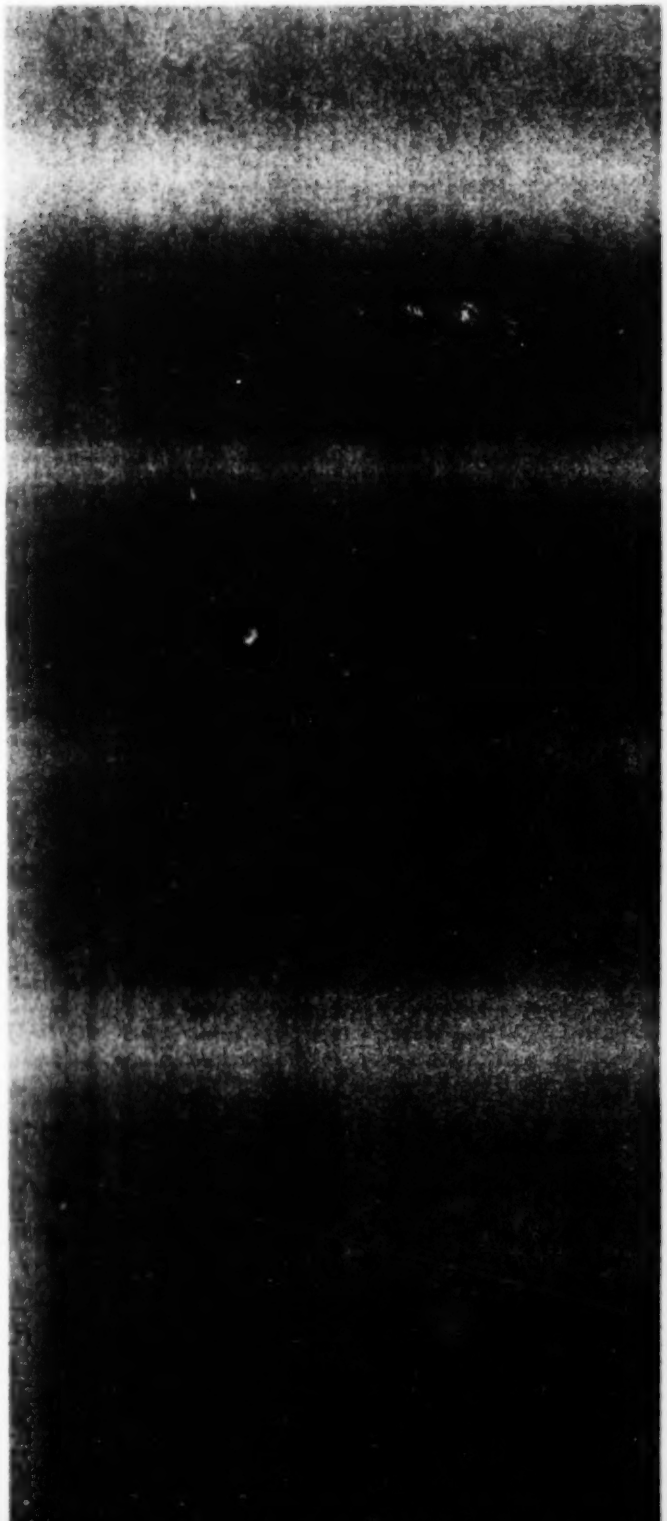

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